



ITASCA COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
ITASCA RESOURCE CENTER
1209 SE 2nd Avenue, Grand Rapids, Minnesota 55744-3983
Hearing Impaired Number TDD: 218-327-5549
(218) 327-2941

Visit us at: www.co.itasca.mn.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DECLINING RATES OF COVID AMONG THE GOOD SEEN IN ITASCA COUNTY

HALLOWEEN THIS YEAR REQUIRES NEW LEVEL OF CAUTION

(Grand Rapids, Minn., **Oct. 30, 2020**) – Itasca County’s rates of COVID-19 rates continue to improve, according to Itasca County Public Health. As of Oct. 25, the county’s 14-day rate of positive COVID-19 cases per 10,000 residents is 37.0, a decline from peak levels in the 40s and 50s over the past several weeks.

As of Oct. 29, the current seven-day total of positives for county residents is 86, the 14-day total is 142 and the cumulative total since March is 794. Nine residents currently are hospitalized due to COVID and two are in intensive care units.

“We’re hoping we can stay the course moving forward,” said Kelly Chandler, department manager, Itasca County Public Health. “We’ve seen a few higher days this week, so we can’t let up on keeping six-foot distances, avoiding gatherings and wearing masks. That’s going to need to be true even for Halloween this weekend.

“If you are celebrating, make sure you are using fabric masks, not the ones that come with your costume. If you are gathering with others, keep groups small (fewer than 10). If you are handing out treats, be sure to avoid hands reaching into bowls. Consider a virtual costume contest, virtual pumpkin carving and shared movie watching. As always, watch for excited trick-or-treaters running along streets. And, adults, if you are celebrating keep social groups small to prevent a large spreading event.

“The steps Itascans are taking to be safe right now are working, and there’s a lot to be grateful for. Gratefulness, itself, has benefits. Physically, you will see improved blood pressure, better sleep, less stomach upset and headaches. Most importantly, during COVID-19 gratitude leads to resilience, helping us overcome stressful situations.”

When asked what they are seeing that is good in Itasca County, a variety of community members shared their experiences and insights.

“We can make the choice to mitigate the spread of this disease,” said Ben DeNucci, Itasca County commissioner and owner of Nashwauk Market. “As civic leaders and public servants, we



make decisions about what benefits the greater good and sometimes that means doing what is right versus what is popular. Today I call on civic leaders to lead by example. Wear a mask when you are in public and support the message of public health and the medical community. Let's let our parents and grandparents know how important their health and safety are to us. Be responsible, stand for what is right in our communities. Please put your mask on."

Bud Stone, president of the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, said that it is important to recognize the willingness of people from throughout the county to do small things that collectively have a large impact. "Organizations are working consciously within their own missions to lessen the impact of COVID. Businesses large and small have made adjustments to provide a safe environment for their employees and customers. Government agencies and municipalities are putting resources on the table to support businesses as they struggle to stay in business. Schools and health care facilities are making long-range plans to ensure that quality education and health care continue to thrive in our area. We should all be very proud to say that we live in the Itasca County area."

Itasca County employees have been working to improve their own wellness by actively noticing what's good and practicing random acts of kindness. According to Brianna Roberts, social worker and member of the county's wellness committee, employees now are focused on sharing ideas for making it through the pandemic. "Smile at people in the halls. Wave at people. And have conversations, asking 'How are you making it through this in a positive, glorious way?'"

Students at Itasca Community College are holding the line on COVID-19, according to Weldon Braxton, head football coach and director of residential living. "I credit our students," said Braxton. "They are aware of the seriousness of the matter. They are doing a really good job of adhering to mask and distancing policies."

Braxton also shared that winter and spring sports have been given a green light for their seasons by the Minnesota Collegiate Athletic Conference. Even though the football season was cancelled, the program will be allowed to conduct developmental programming in the spring. "Of course, everything can change with the numbers," he said.

"I, too, am ready for the virus to relent and for life to get back to normal," said Rev. Bryan Boone, pastor of Bigfork Assembly of God church. "From the hardest times to the best times in my life, faith is what has seen me through. Faith can allow anxious thoughts to dissipate and allow us to focus on the good things. From a church standpoint, a lot are online now and you can jump into any of a number of things."

"Being positive is what has helped me to survive life in a wheelchair and 32 surgeries on top of that," said Myrna Peterson, co-chair of Mobility Mania-Accessibility for All. "Just think of all the new opportunities we have to connect now, when before we were too busy. Saving the time we used to spend traveling to meetings. The chance to dig into closets and plant gardens. Those are the little things that keep me going. I have a plaque that says, 'If I can't do great things, I can do small things in a great way.' We're going to get through this together. I think our



communities can be very proud of all the efforts that have been made to keep us safe. Not for ourselves, we do it for others.”

“We’ve had quite a year,” said Tanis Henderson, school counselor for Deer River High School and president of Minnesota School Counselor Association. “Even though there are concerns about inequities and the trauma we’re all experiencing with the pandemic, I really do see the good, and think there is hope. We’re seeing students rise to the occasion, learning the art of adaptation and utilizing problem-solving skills like self-advocacy and digital navigation, career skills. Even though there are struggles that students are facing, they still have hope and are happy to be at school and participate – whether in-person or hybrid. And students are working their plans—applying for college, engaging in culture, playing sports and making the adjustments they need to make.”

Itasca County organizations again will be part of Gratitude Graffiti, a national initiative in November promoting daily and purposeful appreciation of one’s life through public expression of thankfulness. Posters are available to post in public places throughout the county. Given the pandemic, an additional component has been added by local leaders: a Facebook event titled [GratitudeGraffitiItasca](#) and a hashtag to attach to posts on one’s own social media (#GratitudeGraffitiItasca, set post to public). Posters are available by emailing cchrzan1@fairview.org.

Itasca County has created a local dashboard with current local data, including positive COVID cases by ZIP code. It is at: <https://www.co.itasca.mn.us/798/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Information>. In addition, Independent School District 318 (Bigfork and Grand Rapids) has created a district online COVID [dashboard](#) at its website (www.isd318.org).

Itasca residents with questions or concerns may leave them at the Itasca County COVID message line, with calls returned 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday. The Itasca COVID line number is 218-327-6784.

Useful links

Halloween safety advice - <https://www.essentiahealth.org/about/media-article-library/2020/essentia-health-urges-caution-safety-this-halloween/>

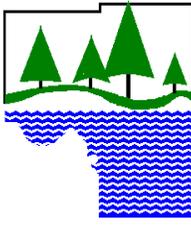
Safe Halloween celebrating - <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/10/28/five-tips-and-a-bunch-of-ideas-to-help-you-celebrate-halloween-safely-this-year>

Resources for teens on self-regulation - <https://www.changetochill.org/>

Itasca Gratitude Graffiti Facebook event:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2887033004861242/>

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Note to media: Itasca County Health Department will host 30-minute press briefings on Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. as needed. The next briefing will be Nov. 12. Recordings available. Contact anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us for more information.

Itasca County Public Health media contacts

Kelly Chandler (218-327-6144 and Kelly.chandler@co.itasca.mn.us) or Anna Anttila (anna.anttila@co.itasca.mn.us).

